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A BELEAGUERED HOME.

It was the last letter in the post-bag that brought the news of our ruin as we sat at breakfast with the windows open to the ground, looking out on the sunny lawn, a silver streak of river beyond, and the mountains shining blue in the distance. The first day of spring, balmy and revivifying. I am no believer in presentiments; misfortune descends upon us unawares, without warning or foreshadowing, and the House Beautiful of our hopes is swept into ruin.

We had been very happy in our married life, little more than a twelvemonth old, with everything seemingly clear and bright before us. And now all was doubt and gloom; our means had vanished into thin air. All my fortune that had been my mother's, and that my father, a colonel in the Indian army, had generously resigned to me, was invested in the Lahore and Delhi Bank, and that had collapsed into ruin.

We had settled in Wales on our marriage, where I took a pleasant little house situated on a sunny slope of a hill overlooking the valley; well sheltered by trees, embowered in flowering shrubs, and covered with creepers; quite an idyllic little place. I had made up my mind to buy it, but the owner required such a heavy price for it, that I hesitated about withdrawing any of my capital from an investment where the return was so handsome as in our bank; and now it was all gone.

I had no profession, either, to fall back upon; I had served for a few years in my father's corps, but the climate of India did not suit me, and as I was an only child, and we had ample means, I retired and came home at the colonel's wish. Then I married my old playmate and my father's ward, Jane Hammond, to his great delight; he promising himself to complete another two years' service, and then to come home and live with his son and daughter.

Whilst I was reading the letter announcing the fatal news, Jane saw by my face that something dreadful had occurred. 'Is it papa?' she cried, for she always called my father thus; 'has any-

thing happened to him?' She seemed absolutely relieved when I told her that nothing had happened but the loss of all our means.

There is a kind of excitement about misfortune, when it first comes upon us, that eases off a certain portion of the shock. We were quite gay over it, I remember, that first day. We were young, with the world before us. We must descend into the arena of life and fight our way to success: hitherto we had been spectators only; for the future we must be actors, heart and soul. We would sell off everything here and go up to London, where I must try for employment. Jane would go out as a daily governess.

One circumstance interfered with any plans of immediate activity on her part. We were daily, almost, expecting the advent of a young stranger; and that must be got over first. Then there were several other hindrances. We had the house upon our hands for another six months at least.

Something could be done about the house at once, my wife suggested. We could write to our landlord and ask him to take it off our hands, or to accept a specified sum in lieu of notice. With an impulse of new-born activity, I sat down to write the note at once. Unexpected misfortunes, I wrote, had put it out of my power to occupy a house at such a rent any longer. Would my landlord kindly consent to some arrangement for relieving me of a portion of my responsibility? 'He must do it; he's sure to do it for his own sake,' said Jane, decidedly. 'If he won't, we'll put a chimney-sweep in the house, or the travelling tinker.' But I didn't feel quite so certain, knowing that landlords are usually tenacious of their rights.

Our landlord was not a native-born Welshman, but a retired attorney from one of the large towns, who had bought the property a bargain, and was bent upon making the most out of it. He lived in a small cottage about a quarter of a mile away, with a rather bold-faced housekeeper. He and I were friendly enough, but Jane would never take the slightest notice of the housekeeper, and I think the young woman resented this hauteur a little. Mr Tranter—that was my landlord's

name—evidently thought me a good tenant, for I had spent a good deal of money in putting things to rights about the house, which had been before in rather a neglected condition. I paid rather a high rent for the place, as rents went in that out-of-the-way locality—ninety pounds a year paid half-yearly. The custom was in those parts to pay the rent on a specified day, a good while after it was due. Thus the Lady-day rents would be paid late in June, and the Michaelmas about December.

I was a great simpleton, I thought afterwards, to write such a letter; for there is no need for a man to trumpet his misfortunes, which get wind soon enough without his aid. But I had at that time a stupid kind of confidence in the good-will of people about me, engendered by a careless, good-natured temper, of which it has taken a good deal of experience to rid me.

The day following that on which the sad news came was the 25th of March. All the sunshine was gone now; a chill north-easter blowing; all the excitement, too, attending our misfortune was over, and the cold, dismal reality clearly visible. The news of our trouble had got about, through the medium of Tranter and Company no doubt. Every one, at least so we fancied, looked queerly at us: a shower of unremembered little bills came drifting in upon us. In the course of the day came a reply from Mr Tranter—a note, at least, taking no notice of my letter, but reminding me that the half-year's rent was this day due.

The same evening about six, I was told that David the fisherman was in the kitchen, and wanted particularly to see me. David had been my guide and companion in many a pleasant fishing expedition; a wiry little fellow; his face lined and seamed with small-pox; with quick, intelligent eyes; and long, lithe fingers, that were deft at anything. David's wife went out as a nurse, and in that capacity she had been retained by my wife for her approaching trouble.

'Beg your pardon, sir,' said David, touching his forelock in salutation, 'I wish to speak with you very particular; yes.'

With that I took David into my own room, where I kept gun and fishing-tackle. 'Beg your pardon, sir,' he said breaking forth suddenly into speech, 'you'll think me a very impudent fellow, but do you owe Mr Tranter any money?'

'Not I; why do you ask, David?'

'Well, sir, as I happened to make a call at the *Skinner's Arms* just now, my cousin, Hugh Jones, came into the bar, not seeing me, and he said to the man he was with: "Is it a good job I will have at Brynnor to-morrow?" "Capital," said Morris—for that was the one he was with—"there will be a week's possession, and then the sale; and between Mr Tranter and me we will skin the young Englishman nicely." There's for you.'

This Morris, it seemed, was an auctioneer and agent in a small way, bailiff of the county court, and wrecker in general. A burly, downcast-looking man, going about in a silent, stealthy manner; respectful to obsequiousness to persons above him in position, but with a hard cold eye that boded ill for any one at his mercy. But I was in no danger of any process of law. What could Morris be to me? Then in an instant I recalled the fact that this was legally the rent-day, and that the law accords to a landlord, without

notice or process, the right to seize his tenant's effects and take possession of his premises.

'But,' I cried, as all this flashed upon me, 'Tranter would never venture on such an outrage.'

'Indeed he would care little for what was said of him if he could make a trifle; and listen, captain—I heard Morris say that he has taken a fancy to your furniture, and means to get it all for the half-year's rent.'

Then I realised for the first time that I was in a very desperate position. I had only a few pounds in my pocket; everything else was locked up in this woful bank. Tranter had come to the conclusion that I was socially moribund, and hoped to have the picking of my bones. To-morrow my cherished home would be in possession of the roughs; and to my poor wife, such a shock would perhaps be fatal. What should I do? It was a cruel thing to contemplate quietly this invasion of my home at such a crisis. Surely any man with a heart not altogether of stone would hold his hand if he knew all the circumstances of the case. With a violent effort I overcame my pride, and resolved that I would humble myself before the man and ask his forbearance.

'Wait here, David,' I said, 'I may want you;' and I hastily took my hat, and went out to Tranter's cottage. I thought I saw his face at the window, as I passed, but when his housekeeper came to the door, she laughed in my face, and denied that he was at home. He had gone out, and probably would not be back till the next day. Evidently Mr Tranter had taken precautions not to be spoken to on the subject. I returned home dejected and miserable. The housemaid was looking out for me as I reached the gate. Her mistress was taken ill; David had been sent to seek his wife, and I must go and fetch the doctor.

At midnight things were still in suspense. The doctor and the nurse were in the house, but Jane was still in her trouble. The doctor talked cheerfully, but looked a little anxious. In one of the intervals when he came down-stairs for a little refreshment, I told him of the position in which I was placed.

'You must keep them out,' he said, 'at all hazards. If my patient has anything to agitate her, it will be her death.'

I took David, who still remained about the premises, into consultation. He brightened up when I told him what I intended to do, and entered heart and soul into the enterprise. We were to stand a siege; it was necessary to lay our plans carefully, and there was short time for preparation. At any time after daybreak the enemy might be upon us. In the first place, as to the out-works—the stable and coachhouse—these must be locked up, and the pony in some way got rid of, for it would be impossible to feed him during the blockade. David volunteered to ride off with the pony, and leave him with a friend up in the hills, among whose pastures he would be safe from possible capture. Then we must get rid of useless mouths. Cook and housemaid must go home for a holiday, and David undertook to get them out of the house. It would be my business to look to the inner defences of the citadel.

The house was long and low, with a gable at each end, and a covered porch between. In one of the gables was the kitchen, and the servants' bedrooms

were above that. The other wing contained dining and drawing rooms, over which were our bedroom and the guest-chamber, with another small closet bedroom lighted from the roof. My own little snugery was at the back on the ground-floor. To this room and the kitchen I determined to confine myself whilst the siege lasted. I went round the house therefore with gimlet, screws, and screw-driver, fastening all the windows, securely closing and barring all the shutters. I muffled all the bells in the house. There was no knocker to the hall door, the upper part of which was glazed to give light to the hall. The windows of the upper rooms I secured in the same way, except that of my wife's chamber, and of the bedroom I occupied myself, the catches of which were perfect, and closed by strong springs. The back-door I bolted and barred, but the hall door I simply locked—this to provide for sudden ingress or egress on the part of the garrison. These precautions taken, I felt rather easier in my mind and sat down to reflect upon the conditions of the contest, and my relations with the outside world.

First, as to supplies—bread would be indispensable, and milk. For the rest there was a quarter of mutton hanging in the larder, and the cellar was pretty well stocked with wine and ale. I had almost forgotten the necessity of firing, and that our coals were kept in a shed outside. Bringing this to mind with a start, I took a coal-scuttle and pail, and brought into the house as much coal as would suffice for a few days' consumption.

David presently returned in high glee at having saved the pony from the enemy's hands, and to him I confided the difficulty as to the bread and milk. The latter he undertook to bring night and morning in a can, and at a concerted signal I was to lower a cord and hook from the upper window and hoist it up. Bread enough for three days' supply he undertook to obtain.

Night dragged wearily on—a long night of trouble and anguish for my poor wife, of anxiety almost amounting to despair on my own part. She was passing through the shadow of death for my sake, and I could not put out a hand to help her. The doctor's face grew graver and graver; the nurse, cheerful and chatty at first, looked fagged and dispirited. Strength was becoming exhausted, life hung in the balance, and every moment the balance was more unfavourably inclined.

At last, just as gray dawn was breaking, a piping babbling cry resounded through the house, announcing the advent of a new life upon the earth.

'Well,' said the doctor, grasping me heartily by the hand, 'it's a fine boy, and we shall do excellently now; only perfect quiet, and stillness, and rest. She wants to see you—but you must not stop a minute.'

As I stood by her bedside, with her poor fevered hand in mine—and I couldn't speak a word, or I should have made a fool of myself—I heard the gate slam to, and I saw, through a crevice in the blind, two men coming down the gravel drive. They separated at the shubbery, and one of them concealed himself among the trees, whilst the other made his way towards the hall door.

'Don't go,' whispered Jane.

'But the doctor orders it.' And I tore myself away, and hurried down to the door. Just in time. The doctor had gone out for a mouthful

of fresh air, and unwittingly left the door ajar. I threw myself upon it, and it slammed to against the ready foot of Mr Morris, whose burly form was shadowed against the ground-glass panes.

Rap-a-tap-tap went his stick against the door.

'Don't trouble yourself to knock again,' I whispered through the keyhole, 'for you shan't come in.' Then warning the doctor of what had happened, I ran rapidly through the house to examine the fastenings. The siege had commenced.

From the first moment, that covered porch was a danger and trouble to the defence. Within it our assailants could lurk unobserved, and it gave them a shelter from the weather that I was by no means inclined to afford them. At the very outset, all my pains were nearly frustrated. I heard a ringing sound upon the pavement of the hall, and running hastily thither, I found that the key had just fallen from the lock, and another key was being introduced from outside. My landlord had evidently kept duplicate keys of the doors, and the bailiff had made use of one of those little instruments known to house-breakers, by which the end of a key within its lock can be seized and turned round from the other side. I was just in time to place my foot against the door, whilst I succeeded in putting the bar across. My heart beat violently with excitement, and I was tortured by the thought that some forgotten precaution might ruin everything. But after this first attempt nothing more was done; quiet and silence reigned everywhere through the house.

I let the doctor out through the drawing-room window, which I immediately secured. He had undertaken to see Mr Tranter, and try to induce him to withdraw his men. He presently returned, and spoke to me at the window of my bedroom. 'No use,' he said softly; 'he'll have his pound of flesh.'

The day passed heavily enough. At every sound I quivered and trembled, thinking that the men had broken in. I paced softly up and down the house, watching at every opening. After some hours, Mr Morris went away, leaving his man on guard—a fellow with a dirty-white comforter twisted round his neck, and a battered, greasy hat. He forthwith began to pace about the grounds, and as he passed he turned his bloodshot, ferret eyes to the upper window where I sat, and laughed at me defiantly.

Thankfully I saw the sun disappear behind the hills, and darkness creep over the landscape. Everything had gone well in the sick-room; in another hour it would be safe to open the doors, and wander freely about. It was one of those moments suitable for surprises, when vigilance is lulled by a feeling of coming safety. Suddenly I heard a sound upon the roof, as of some heavy body bumping upon the slates. Could they be effecting an entry through the roof? Then I bethought me of the skylight in the closet bedroom, which I had overlooked. I ran to the place, and sure enough the skylight was open, and the ill-omened face of Morris peering in. Luckily the room was quite dark, and the man hesitated to lower himself down into the seeming abyss. He turned to call his man, and I seized the opportunity to spring at the fastening of the skylight, and pull it down, hanging upon it with all my weight. After several ineffective attempts to raise

it, the men desisted, supposing it securely fastened. This was their last enterprise for the night. Soon after, the men drew off, and I was free to open the doors.

All was still going on well with mother and child; but the former had been a good deal disturbed by a noise on the roof; her face was quite fevered and flushed as she eagerly asked what the noises meant.

'A man come to look after the roof; I sent him away, of course.'

Presently the doctor came. He was not altogether satisfied with his patient.

'There is feverishness,' he said to me, after he had left the room, 'which I don't like. She must be kept quiet, at all hazards.'

But that was easier said than done, for now that the immediate peril was over, she began to worry and fret about me. Was I made comfortable, and did the servants look after me? Had I had a proper dinner? She should like to see Cook, to give her some directions.

'The doctor expressly forbids any one to see you.'

'I don't care what he says.'

'Then I forbid you,' I said, making a prudent retreat, to avoid further rejoinder.

I had a long walk in the darkness, thinking over what I should do. I had written to several friends, on the spur of the moment, the night before, asking for a temporary loan to meet this sudden call; but I had little hope of any favourable reply, and I almost regretted having subjected myself to the humiliation of refusal. My father was in India, and had troubles enough of his own, for his fortunes, too, were embarked in this bank. Of course, I couldn't hold out very long; the men would find a way in at last, and all my goods would be seized. Fairly sold, there was enough to satisfy all my liabilities here, and give a handsome surplus; but in the hands of these harpies, everything would go for an old song. Still, if I could keep them out for a week, till Jane got strength enough to rally from the shock, that was all I could expect or hope for.

I reached home weak and hungry, for I had not had enterprise enough to cook anything for myself, and had eaten nothing but bread all the day. To my surprise I was greeted by a fragrant smell of cooking from the kitchen, and entering, found David standing over a capital fire, his face glowing in the blaze. 'Caught some trouts for your supper, captain,' quoth David. Delicious they were, those crisp brown trout, to a hungry, weary man. David waited upon me with gratified pride, and urged me on to eat still more and more hot from the pan. He had come to the conclusion, he told me after supper, to which he had been prompted by his wife, that he must come and look after me, and assist in the defence of the house, and he would employ his leisure moments in looking after my fishing-tackle, and trying some particularly killing flies for our next fishing expedition. I was very glad of David's company, for I had felt the strain of loneliness and isolation very much that day.

After supper, David produced a truss of straw, and spread it over the oven and about the kitchen fire to dry.

'What's that for, David?' I asked.

'Very likely I sleep in it,' he replied, winking knowingly.

There were plenty of beds upstairs, I told him; but he went on in his operations with the straw.

We had a quiet night, but the patient got very little sleep at first, being nervous and frightened when I was out of her sight, so that I took my rest in an arm-chair by her bedside, and after that she had some refreshing slumber. Daybreak brought our besiegers back again; but this time there were three of them, and they carried among them something that I took to be a ladder.

I woke David, and set him on the alert, and went over the house once more to see that all was safe. David took up his position upon a table in the little closet chamber, with his head out of the skylight reconnoitring the neighbourhood. Suddenly I heard him close the skylight and hurry down-stairs. 'Come along, captain,' he cried; 'I shall shew you some fun.' I followed him into the back-kitchen, where there was a wide open chimney of the old-fashioned sort. Upon its hearth was now piled a great heap of the straw that David had dried last night. A scrambling sound was heard in the chimney, and the bottom of a light ladder appeared, gently lowered down. 'Come you then, boys!' shouted David up the chimney; and with that he put a match to the straw, which blazed up fiercely. We heard a loud cry of rage and pain, and a quick scrambling up the chimney. David laughed defiantly. 'Plenty more fire down here,' he cried; and dragged the captured ladder into the kitchen. The enemy sullenly retaliated by throwing some water down the chimney. But David did not care for that; he had a reserve of dry straw ready to set fire to, if any further attempt were made. They presently abandoned any active means to gain an entrance, and contented themselves with a strict blockade; but it was a very narrow thing that attempt on the chimney, and if David had not been warned over night by the man they borrowed the ladder from, it would have assuredly succeeded.

It was necessary now for David to make a sortie. We had not sent to the post-office during two days, and it was just possible that there might be lying there an answer to one or other of the letters I had written. The post-office was five miles away, and David could not be back in much less than three hours. The fear was, that seeing the garrison so much weakened, the besiegers might make an attack on all sides at once.

But the time of his absence passed quietly enough, and David's honest face appeared on the lawn in front of the house long before I expected to see it.

'I can't come in, captain,' he cried; 'for they mean to make a rush upon me; but let down a bit of cord with a hook at the end quietly out of the window.'

This line of communication, which was invisible to those on the watch, was quickly established, and David fixed the hook into a little bundle of letters, which I quickly hoisted up. Two were excuses from friends—'Awfully sorry, so very short ourselves,' and so on. The third no doubt was to the same purport; but whose handwriting was it? I tore it hastily open, and read: 'Dear Harry, just come home on furlough about the affairs of this blessed bank. Things are not so bad as they said. Tom Brown has just shewn me your letter. Here are fifty pounds in notes to pay the rascals off; and I will be down myself

to-morrow.' Sure enough, inside the letter were ten nice crisp Bank of England five-pound notes.

I ran down and threw wide open the hall-door, letting in the air and blessed sunshine.

'Are you mad, captain,' cried David, as my three foes came rushing down upon me.

'Stand off,' I cried, making play with my fists, and keeping them at a distance. 'What do you want?'

'Five and forty pounds, half-a-year's rent, for Mr Tranter, and expenses,' gasped Morris, preparing for another rush.

'Here's the money for the rent—now give me a receipt. No; not inside the house,' I said.

Mr Morris knelt down on the gravel to write his receipt. 'And expenses six pounds ten,' he said, looking up.

'For which you will apply to your employer.'

David who had been looking on wondering, here cut a caper high in the air. Morris drew his men away sullenly, and thus ended the siege of Brynmor.

Next day my father came down, confident and cheerful. Things were bad enough, but there was the chance of something being saved out of the wreck. In the meantime he must stop in harness for another five years. For me he had the offer of the editorship of an Indian newspaper that was being established at Lahore, an offer I gladly accepted. And in due time I left Brynmor with all the honours of war, and found myself with my wife and babe embarked for the wondrous land of Inde.

TWO LATELY DISCOVERED TEXTILE FIBRES.

MUCH interest has recently been awakened in America concerning two textile fibres, *Ramee* and *Pita*, and no little enterprise has been displayed in endeavours to turn them to account; strong hopes being entertained that the former will soon become an important article of agricultural produce in some of the most southern of the United States, and that both will prove of great value for manufacturing purposes, opening up new sources of wealth. Neither of these fibres is in any sense new; they have both been well known for a long time, although their value, if really such as the Americans are now ascribing to them, has not been generally and duly appreciated. As to *ramee*, at least, there can be no doubt that it deserves all the commendation they bestow on it. It first became known in this country in consequence of the occasional importation of the beautiful fabric called *China Grass Cloth*, which is made of it. It is now imported to some extent from China; the export of it from Shanghai alone, according to the last report, amounting to more than 7,000,000 pounds in a year, almost all of which came to England, where it is used as a substitute for silk, and enters largely into mixed dress goods having 'a silk finish,' brilliant, durable, and useful fabrics, which have attained no little popularity in this country, and for which there is also a great demand in the United States.

The Americans have adopted the Malayan name of the fibre, *Ramee*; and that we shall henceforth call the plant, which is a native of China, and has been long cultivated also in Japan, Sumatra,

Java, Siam, Burmah, Assam, and other countries of the same part of the world. It belongs to the Nettle tribe, the natural order *Urticeae*, and to a genus (*Boehmeria*) which differs very little from the true nettles, except in the important particular that its species have no stinging hairs. There seems to be a little doubt whether the fibre used in manufactures is the produce of only one species, or of two or three nearly allied species. If it is obtained from one species throughout the whole vast region that produces it, the plant has received a number of different names from different botanists. The plant is herbaceous and perennial, and is propagated either by seed, or by parting of the roots. Considerable difficulty was experienced in the first attempts to cultivate the *ramee* in America, owing to ignorance of the peculiarities of soil and treatment necessary; but it has been found that it succeeds well if planted in a rich, deep, moist, well-drained soil, manure being added when the soil is not naturally very rich; the land ploughed to the depth of eight or ten inches, and well pulverised by harrowing. Weeds must be carefully cleaned off. As in China, three crops a year are obtained in Louisiana, new stems springing up, when a crop has been cut; but this, of course, weakens the roots, so that they cannot be expected to continue equally productive for many years. An acre of land is found to yield from four to five hundred pounds of crude fibre at each cutting, or from twelve hundred to two thousand pounds a year, which can be sold to American manufacturers at a price of from twenty to twenty-five cents per pound, making the annual produce of an acre from forty-five to almost one hundred pounds sterling, a produce sufficient to encourage further enterprise in this new branch of agriculture, which will, probably, not long be confined to Louisiana, but will extend over all the Gulf States, and as far north as the climate is suitable, although this cannot be very far, as the plant will not endure the frosts of winter, such as are experienced in Kentucky and Tennessee.

As regards preparation, the Americans take the stems as they come in bunches or sheaves from the field, and at once subject them to the action of machinery, by which they are crushed and scraped, and the fibre is turned out clean, as corn is turned out from the thrashing-mill. In this way, the fibre is neither discoloured nor weakened by moisture, as the fibres of flax and hemp certainly are, in a greater or less degree, by the ordinary process of retting.

Dr Roxburgh, whose work on the *Plants of Coromandel* is one of the most splendid contributions ever made to Indian botany, and who devoted his attention most earnestly to the useful plants of India, brought the *ramee* or *rhea* fibre under the notice of the Court of Directors of the East India Company in 1816; and they, after due examination, declared this fibre to be 'stronger than Russian hemp of the best description,' and to have been 'brought to a thread preferable to the best material in Europe for Brussels lace.' It may seem surprising that, for many years after the fibre had been thus strongly commended, and by so high an authority, almost nothing was done towards its introduction into Britain for manufacturing purposes. But this has been the case also as to other fibres—jute, for example, which is now so largely used, especially in Dundee; and sunn, which has

begun to be imported. The first alpaca wool that was imported into this country from South America, found, for a long while, no purchasers, till Mr (now Sir Titus) Salt happening to see a little of it escaping through a hole in a bag that lay neglected in a shed at Liverpool, was struck with its novel appearance, examined it, and at once appreciated its value. What followed is well known—the extensive manufacture of alpaca goods, and the rapid development of a new branch of commerce. In regard to a new fibre, not only are prejudices to be overcome, but a serious practical difficulty has to be surmounted, in the necessity of machinery specially adapted to it, involving an amount of expense which is formidable, whilst success cannot be regarded as certain till the experiment is fairly tried. As to ramee, however, the experiment has been tried in this country, and has resulted in complete success; so that we may expect to see, ere long, a great increase in the importation of the fibre from China, and also its importation on a large scale from India and other parts of the East. If the cultivation of the plant is carried on with success in Louisiana, as there seems no reason to doubt that it will be, it is not improbable that we may also import ramee from America, as we import cotton, and compete with American manufacturers in the utilisation of the produce of their own soil.

Pita, the other fibre at present engaging attention in America, is of more doubtful value than ramee, although the American papers contain most flattering notices of it. According to an account which we have read of it in a New York paper, it is derived 'from a plant or tree discovered in Mexico, and is said to be similar to hemp or jute.' One would suppose that this 'plant or tree' had been newly discovered, and that Pita was unknown till the present time. But in the article 'Agave' in *Chambers's Encyclopædia*, information will be found on this subject, and it may be found also in many other works of older date. Pita is the fibre of the leaves of the *Agave Americana*, popularly called the American Aloe; although that name is an incorrect and misleading one, for the plant is very different from the true aloes. It is a native of Mexico, and is one of the largest and most beautiful of herbaceous plants; has large fleshy leaves, all growing from the root, from the midst of which it throws up a *scape*, or leafless flowering stem from twenty-four to thirty-six feet high, which produces a prodigious number of flowers, sometimes as many as four thousand. When the flowering stem is cut over in an early stage of its growth, a copious flow of sap takes place, and this sap speedily fermenting, forms a beverage called *Pulque*, much used in Mexico, although generally disliked by those unaccustomed to it, because of its peculiar flavour. A spirituous liquor is obtained from it by distillation. The fibre of the leaves, called *Maguey* or *Pita*, has long been used in Mexico for making thread, twine, ropes, &c. It has been generally described as coarse, and not very strong or durable, soon decaying if exposed to moisture. It is now said by the Americans, who are endeavouring to introduce it for the manufacture of cloth, to be very fine and strong, of a pale yellow colour; and a sample six or seven feet in length has been exhibited in New York. From the size of the leaves of the plant, there is no difficulty in believing that

specimens of seven feet long, or upwards, may be obtained; and as to the quality of the fibre, perhaps the difference of statement may be accounted for by difference in the mode of preparation. The common practice in Mexico has hitherto been to separate the fibre from the pulp and other parts of the leaf by maceration; but this is extremely injurious to the fibres of endogenous plants in general, to which great division of the Vegetable Kingdom the *Agave* belongs; so that if the American speculators concerned in the matter separate the fibre by mere mechanical processes—as is done in the case of New Zealand flax, Manilla hemp, and other endogenous fibres—without subjecting the leaves to the action of water, it is quite imaginable that they may have as the result a fibre very superior in quality to the ordinary maguey or pita of Mexico. 'There would seem,' says the *New York Bulletin*, 'to be every evidence that pita is destined to supply a most valuable material to manufactures and commerce, and that the possession of the territory producing it, and the supply to this country, and perhaps Europe, will make fortunes for those whose foresight has given them the ownership.' We hope that pita may prove as good and useful as those who have entered on the enterprise of introducing it into the United States for manufacturing purposes can imagine it to be; and we hope also that they will be rewarded for their enterprise, by making large fortunes out of it. But as to possession of the territory producing, or capable of producing this fibre, it is rather too much for any individual or company to think of making it exclusively their own.

If the attempts now being made to introduce the manufacture of ramee and of pita cloth in America are successful, it is probable that similar attempts will soon be made to employ in a similar manner other fibres which may be obtained from different parts of the world. Several species of *Boehmeria*—the genus to which the ramee plant belongs—yield fibres which are used for textile purposes in the East Indies. Of these, one that seems particularly worthy of attention is *B. frutescens*, which, as it grows on the Himalaya at an elevation of three thousand feet above the level of the sea, might probably be found suitable for climates too cold for the ramee. It is not cultivated in its native country, but often overruns abandoned fields. It attains a height of from six to eight feet, and the stem varies in thickness from that of a quill to that of the thumb.

Ramee, like flax, hemp, jute, and the sunn of India, is the fibre of the inner bark of the stem of an exogenous plant. All the important textile fibres yielded by exogenous plants belong to the inner bark of the stem; or they are fibres of the fruit, as cotton and coir—the coarse fibre of the cocoa-nut. None are obtained from the leaves, the reticulated venation of which is inconsistent with the production of fibres long enough for textile purposes. But the leaves of endogenous plants having parallel venation, fibres are readily obtained of the whole length of the leaf. It might seem that these were more likely to be used, especially in the early ages of the world, than the fibres obtained with more difficulty, by steeping and other processes, from the inner bark of stems. But it has not been so; and at this day, the only endogenous fibres of any commercial importance are Manilla Hemp, the produce of a species of plantain or

banana, and New Zealand flax, the produce of a grass-like plant known to botanists as *Phormium tenax*. Those best acquainted with this subject, however, think it very probable that several other endogenous fibres may soon acquire importance, as those of the *Sansevieras* of India and Africa, and those of the common plantain and banana of the West Indies and other tropical countries.

THE BLOSSOMING OF AN ALOE.

CHAPTER XVII.—ALL SAFE.

THROUGHOUT the busy hours of the following day, Lady Mervyn was constantly revolving in her mind the facts of the situation. Her son's wife was dead, and the colonel of his regiment, the only person, except Lucy's quite insignificant relatives, who was aware that he had had a wife, was dead also. She had been both surprised and relieved by the demeanour of Mr and Mrs Ferris; and after the first great surprise of Lucy's death had passed away, with the strangely swift action of time and thought under exceptional circumstances, it seemed to her as if she had been prepared for that event. She could not go back to the mental condition in which she had travelled up to London—fiercely angry, bitterly hurt, and outraged, and yet, not daring to neglect the injunction of her son—for the purpose of seeing the person whom, of all the world, she regarded with the strongest abstract dislike, that son's wife. To say that Lady Mervyn was positively glad that Lucy was dead, would be to make her out worse than she really was, rapidly as she had deteriorated under temptation. She did not think of the event in the light of either gladness or regret; she regarded it with a sort of complacent amazement, such as one feels when Providence, in an unexpected manner, intervenes in the game of one's life, and plays it for one. She had not had time to familiarise herself with the notion of Lucy, when Lucy was removed from her plane of mental vision as suddenly as she had been placed there; and she was entirely incapable of realising what the brief story which had come to an end had meant to David. Lady Mervyn loved her son without understanding him; the isolation, and habit of governing which characterised her own life, rendered her views of character narrow, and she found little difficulty in persuading herself that David would be easily consoled. There were moments during that day when the whole thing seemed like a dream to her, when she could hardly believe that there had really been a living tenant for that room she had so lately visited, and that living tenant the 'Lucy' of whom the letter in her possession spoke with such love and pleading. If David's mother had but seen Lucy once, had but stood by her death-bed, it might all have been otherwise; the better side of her nature might have been aroused and touched. As it was, she hardened herself against every consideration save that of the folly of her son; and the possibility of saving him, even now, from its lesser consequences, since Providence had decreed that he should not suffer the greater.

It was plain that there was no annoyance to be apprehended from Lucy's relatives. Evidently, Mr and Mrs Ferris had no intention of claiming any

privilege or profit from their quasi-connection with the Mervyns; they would regard the matter as closed with the handing over of David's little daughter to the care of her natural protectors. *And they would have left England for ever, long before David, under the most favourable circumstances, could return.* Every time that this reflection came to Lady Mervyn, and it constantly occurred, while she was going in and out of shops, and visiting her friend in high official place—who was all sympathy and polite attention—it came, accompanied by the temptation which had shot into her mind on the previous evening, and which was gradually assuming distinct form and substance.

Two days had elapsed since the interview between Lady Mervyn and Mrs Ferris, and no letter had yet been written to David. Lady Mervyn had returned to her hotel to dine, when she was informed that a person named Gale wished to see her.

'Let her come in at once,' said Lady Mervyn; and, while the attendant went to summon her visitor, she poured out and drank hurriedly a glass of wine.

Mrs Gale was a mild-looking woman, about forty-five years of age, simply dressed, as a servant in a high-class family might be, and with the quiet and well-trained manners of that position. She made an old-fashioned courtesy on entering the room, and took the seat which Lady Mervyn indicated, as composedly as if she had just dropped in from next door. But when they were alone, Mrs Gale clasped the hand which Lady Mervyn extended to her, and kissed it fervently.

'You have lost no time, Susan. How did you contrive to get away so soon?'

'You wanted me, my lady—that was enough.'

'You can stay a few days, if necessary?'

'As long as your ladyship pleases. I have taken a room at a respectable coffee-house in the Marylebone Road, and I am entirely at your service. Your ladyship looks ill and worn; I hope there is nothing wrong at Barrholme?'

'No, my good Susan; there is nothing wrong there: it is trouble about my son. He has been guilty of a great folly, and I want you to help me to save him from its results.'

'I cannot be glad of anything that is a grief to you, my lady,' said the quiet woman, over whose face a sudden light of love and devotion shone; 'but I *must* be glad that I can do anything to help you; to prove that time has not made me forgetful.'

'I know, I know, Susan,' said Lady Mervyn. 'I never doubted you, and I can trust you entirely, as I would trust no one else in the world. Take off your bonnet and shawl, and prepare for a long story. It is no light thing I have to tell, and to ask of you.'

The conference was a long one. When at length it came to an end, and Mrs Gale took leave of Lady Mervyn, the face of the latter bore a weary expression; but yet she sat by the hearth lost in thought, for fully an hour longer, until the fire had dropped away into a handful of smouldering ashes.

While Susan Gale is absent, doing the behest of her former mistress, the story of the tie which bound them so closely together may be told in a few words. When Lady Mervyn was a young

woman, living in London, Susan Thompson entered her service in the capacity of nursery-maid, and her only brother was engaged at the same time as page. The girl's intelligence, diligence, and unusual attachment to her ladyship—who passed more time in her nursery than was customary with fashionable mothers—attracted Lady Mervyn's attention, and Susan got speedy promotion in the household. Not so James Thompson, the page. The boy got into bad habits, committed a theft, was detected by Lady Mervyn herself, and—prosecuted? No; forgiven, screened from shame, saved from the sure and rapid ruin of a prison, rescued, to become one of the rarest of phenomena, a repentant and grateful convert from evil ways. Only Lady Mervyn, Susan Thompson, and the lucky lad himself, ever knew the story; and the woman who had acted from motives of the purest charity, reaped a rich reward in the devotion of two human hearts—more than many good people gain in all their lives. James Thompson had lived ever since, and proposed to die, in her ladyship's service; but Susan had left her some years previously, having married a well-educated and intelligent young man belonging to the Barrholme village, who had been set up by Mr Cairnes as a schoolmaster, in a small way, at Manchester. The bond between Susan Gale and Lady Mervyn had not been severed by absence; and now, when the proud woman needed aid, she asked it, confidently, from the humblest, but the truest of her friends.

Lady Mervyn intended to leave London by the mail of the following evening. All her preparations were made for doing so, and she had been occupied in writing during the morning and a portion of the afternoon. The heavy task she so much dreaded was done at last; the terrible letter which was to inflict a blow, whose severity she could not estimate, upon her son, was written. She had duly received from Mrs Ferris the statement which she had requested her to send, and it was inclosed in her own letter, which she had placed in a cover addressed to the Head of the Medical Department at Scutari. It had cost the mother dreadful pain to write the few lines of entreaty by which she begged this official personage to use his discretion in bringing the letter which she confided to him—and which she acknowledged contained distressing news, under the notice of her son. And yet, not all the pain she endured, had the power to induce the woman who had forgiven so much to the husband who had offended her, to pardon either the son, who had offended her once only, or the dead woman whom he loved, and who had owed her no duty. The pang endured, the task fulfilled, Lady Mervyn waited.

An hour before she was to leave the hotel, a letter was brought to her. It contained the following lines:

HONOURED MADAM—I have exactly obeyed your orders, and am now ready to return to Manchester. Mrs Ferris did not ask my name; but when I told her I had come from you, and she had read the note you gave me, she at once brought the child to me. She is a very pretty child, but delicate-looking, and very quiet. She cried at first, but has since taken to me. Mrs Ferris spoke of the poor mother as Mrs Mervyn, and of the Captain as her husband, and I, of course, seemed to believe

it all. I am quite certain no one could have found out from my manner that there was any doubt about the marriage. I said all you desired me to say about the little girl's future, and promised, for your ladyship, that they should hear news of her before their departure from England. Mrs Ferris also gave me a boxful of the child's clothes; and I never saw anything more beautiful than the work on them, all done by the poor mother herself. I shall have started by the time your ladyship reads this. I have told Gale nothing but that it is in our power to oblige our best friend; I am not afraid that he will not welcome the little girl, although, until I receive your ladyship's permission, I will never let him know that she is the Captain's child. I think your ladyship knows that I will be true and faithful to what I have undertaken, and that if the marriage really was a marriage, and the Captain comes to claim his daughter, he will find her as well cared for as if she had gone to his own home; but if it does not turn out to be so, and he does what your ladyship would wish in that case, allowing us to bring the child up as our own, we will do our best to make her a good honest girl. I could say a great deal more to your ladyship, only that I am a slow writer, and I have not time; but I must *make* time to beg your ladyship not to grieve over what has happened; you must remember that the Captain is spared to you, and trust that all will be right. And I am sure you will forgive this boldness from your ladyship's most grateful and faithful servant,

SUSAN GALE.

An hour after she had read and destroyed this letter, Lady Mervyn was journeying towards Scotland. She was exceedingly tired in body as well as exhausted in mind, and she felt, as the train sped rapidly through the darkness, that thought was impossible, that she must defer it until physical rest should have restored her. She did not sleep, but the hours passed, and she was in a kind of lethargy, in which neither thinking nor suffering was active. She asked herself in intervals of distinctness whether it was indeed possible that only five days before she had travelled down from Scotland. The time seemed intolerably long, measured by what she had suffered in it; and incredibly short, measured by its events. When she arrived at Dumfries, Lady Mervyn found her carriage waiting for her, and she decided on going on to Barrholme. At home, she could really rest and think, and be rid of this painful, unreal, dream-like oppression. During the drive, her thoughts became clearer; she could at least recall what she had done, and pass her hopes in review. She had the concealment of David's 'folly,' for the present, to place on the list of her successes; she had fulfilled his behest in the letter, while violating it in the spirit. The only positive falsehood of which she had been guilty in the transaction which was constructively false throughout, was that by which she had expressed to Susan Gale a doubt of the validity of her son's marriage, of which, of course, she did not entertain the slightest. If she could but succeed in inducing David to make the only atonement within his power for the offence of his secret marriage, by still maintaining the secret, and consenting to leave the child unacknowledged—an infant whom he had hardly seen, and could not care very much about—then, Susan Gale must not be permitted to know that the child had rights.

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The great thing was to gain time, to persuade David to silence now, to let this folly rest, known only to her and to him, and then to wait for events. He would hardly offend his mother further at present, by revealing the truth to Sir Alexander and the world, when she for whom he had been guilty of the folly was lost to him for ever; and when that mother only asked of him to wait. For what? She did not put that question distinctly to herself, as yet; she only felt that it could not matter while the child was an infant, and that something, anything might happen to bury the whole miserable business in oblivion. Had not the most improbable, unexpected, wonderful thing happened already! Fate owed her some compensation, Lady Mervyn felt, for a troubled life, and could not be about to hit her harder still than she had been hit by the double blows of her son's disobedience and his danger. The sum of it all was a respite; but that was much, very much, when Lady Mervyn remembered the feelings with which she had left Barrholme. The oppression on her mind was not increased, as in the case of most women such trouble would be, by its being an unshared trouble; she was well accustomed to that, and indeed, to her, partition or expansion of feeling was almost impossible, chiefly from the habit of the opposite. It was almost dark when she arrived at Barrholme, and her unbroken journey of so many hours, added to the fatigue of her occupations in London, sufficiently accounted for her paleness and weariness.

CHAPTER XVIII.—A SHOCK.

'Mamma looks very ill, I think,' said Marion to Anne, when Lady Mervyn had retired. 'I never venture to say anything to her, but I am afraid she is more than tired. It must be something extraordinary that makes papa think of anybody's health except his own, but I can see he is quite uneasy.'

Anne had been silently observing Lady Mervyn also, and she too thought her looking ill. But Anne's thoughts did not stop there; once again she found herself involved in something like a mystery at Barrholme, and she vividly recalled the day on which she had seen David for the last time. Even as he had then assigned a motive for his departure which she felt to be false, so Lady Mervyn had now assigned a motive for her journey which Anne felt to be insufficient; and she was haunted by a conviction that in this second instance also David was concerned. The unuttered confidence of Lady Mervyn's farewell to her, had meant much to Anne's quick perception, and though she had not addressed half-a-dozen sentences to her on her return, Anne felt an inner consciousness that their relations were changed and strengthened. With the subtle pleasure of this knowledge, what pain there was also! For Anne, indeed, in her unreturned love, there was little but pain. Would Lady Mervyn come to trust her wholly, she asked herself, to let her share the trouble on David's account, whatever it might be, which had underlain the ostensible purpose of her journey to London? The next day, Lady Mervyn resumed her usual occupations, and in answer to their questions, said she was quite well. No incident of any importance had occurred.

Barrholme was not one of those country houses

in which there reigns a feverish anxiety on all hands to get hold of the newspapers. When any intelligence from the Crimea was to be looked for, the arrival of the post-bag was the signal for a general assembly, but even then, a very superficial looking over of the *Times* sufficed for Marion, who cared nothing for details of anything beyond the doings of her brother's regiment, and another to which some friends of hers belonged. Sir Alexander Mervyn was anything but a reading man, but an invalid is forced into reading habits by degrees, however much they may be against the grain; and thus he had contracted, not exactly a taste, but a toleration for the miscellaneous literature of the daily press, which, before Marion's marriage, he had indulged rather more at her expense than she altogether liked. The single restriction on her liberty, indeed, had been the daily reading of the *Times* to her father, and she had indemnified herself for it ever since by a general voluntary ignorance of public affairs, which would have done honour to an Italian or a Spanish woman. Now that she had come to Barrholme on a long visit, she was naturally afraid she might again be expected to read the *Times* aloud to Sir Alexander, and having given utterance to that apprehension to Anne Cairnes, she was infinitely pleased, and more than ever convinced of Anne's admirable qualities as a 'great friend,' for, as she remarked to Gordon Graeme, 'nobody could possibly like reading all that dry stuff out, when one can't skip.' Thus, Anne was in the habit of going in the morning to Sir Alexander's dressing-room to read to him, and she went as usual on the second day after Lady Mervyn's return. Much to her surprise, she found Lady Mervyn, dressed as usual, and sitting by the window which overlooked the sea-wall. She still looked weary, and in answer to Anne's question, she said she had passed a sleepless night. Sir Alexander remarked gravely that she had 'overdone herself quite unreasonably'; and Anne having handed the *Times* to Sir Alexander, was going away, when Lady Mervyn asked her to stay and read aloud as usual.

Anne complied; while Lady Mervyn, her head turned away from the reader, looked vaguely out to sea, her thoughts far away. Anne had read through the political and foreign news and the leading articles, and was glancing over the miscellaneous contents of the paper, when her eye caught the announcement of a 'Frightful Accident on the North Midland Railway.' Anne's own instinct was to avoid the perusal of horrors, but she habitually overcame it, in the interest of Sir Alexander, who liked them.

'A bad railway accident,' she said, 'and a long report of it. Shall I read it?'

'If you please. Carelessness again, I suppose. The old story.' For that story was already old, twenty years ago; and so was the story of inhumanly hard work, for wretched pay, and strain on men's minds and bodies beyond what those marketable commodities were constructed or intended to bear.

Anne read the account, which, divested of technicalities, officialities, and assurances that the strictest investigation of all the circumstances was about to be made immediately—that one fashion of twenty years ago is still permanent—was as follows.

A train, unusually crowded with passengers,

which had left London on the evening on which Lady Mervyn had commenced her journey, had been run into by a goods-train within a few miles of Manchester. The damage done had been great: the driver and stoker, and five passengers were killed; and the injuries inflicted were numerous and severe. The condition of one compartment was described as particularly awful. Its occupants were a man, three women, and two female children. The carriage was shattered almost to pieces; the man and the two women were killed. One of the women, much younger than the other, had apparently undressed her child, and laid it upon the seat beside her, where it was found, injured, but living, the mother having fallen sideways over it. The older woman occupied a corner-seat, and was found dead with an infant tightly clutched in her arms. She was not much disfigured, death having ensued from a blow on the back of the head. As yet, the identity of the younger woman had not been ascertained, but she was believed to have been the mother of both the children, who were apparently of the same age, and it was supposed that the elder woman had taken one of them to hold, while the mother undressed the other, as she had since been identified by her husband, Mr Thomas Gale, of Union Street, a schoolmaster, who stated that she had no child.

'Good heavens!' exclaimed Anne, as the words passed her lips. 'It must be Susan Gale!'

'Susan Gale!' Lady Mervyn uttered the words in a kind of hoarse cry, and rose from her chair, as if moved by a spring. 'Read that again, Anne; quick, quick!'

Anne, much moved, complied; while Sir Alexander, who did not exactly know why they were so agitated, stared at the two.

'Yes, it is too true. Poor Susan! What a state James will be in!'

But Lady Mervyn did not hear her. She averted forward for an instant, then fell back into her chair, and fainted.

It was a strange and unheard-of state of affairs at Barrholme for any one to claim attention on the score of illness, except Sir Alexander. To him, especially, it was almost incomprehensible that he should be of secondary importance, and his wife, who was as indispensable to the getting along of the household at Barrholme as a linch-pin is to a cart-wheel, laid by. His astonishment had time to mature into anxiety, alarm, and suspense, such as he had never before experienced in the whole course of his good-for-nothing life; such as the intelligence of his son's danger had been far from arousing in him. Sir Alexander had not the faculty of grieving for circumstances which took place at a distance; he could be shocked for a while, and then fidgety for a while about them, but not grieved. When, however, the doctor came, and pronounced that Lady Mervyn's prolonged fainting-fit meant serious illness, and when day after day went by, and that illness was still serious, Sir Alexander was very unhappy indeed. As to picturing to himself what his future life would be without his wife, he eagerly drove away every fancy of the kind that suggested itself, and wavered, in a lamentable sort of way, between impatience, which was almost anger with the sick woman herself, and dependence upon the comforting assurances of the people in the house, who expressed much more confidence

than they felt. Meanwhile, she who was the centre of so much anxiety, was profoundly indifferent to it all. In proportion to the unyielding strength and stern reserve of her character, had been the completeness of the nervous smash when it came; and, probably, in that completeness consisted the safety of her life. Lady Mervyn made no resistance, no effort; memory, fear, suffering itself, to any great extent, were effaced; while one of those mysterious fevers, of which it has been well said that the patient not so much *has*, as *is* the disease, had its way with her. Anne Cairnes remained at Barrholme, for Marion's sake, who was simply terrified and useless.

'I should know all about it, if it were papa who was ill,' she said to Anne; 'but I cannot get over the dread I have of seeing mamma, whose head managed everything in the house and out of it, in that helpless state. I am of no use; I cannot answer the doctor's questions, or help the nurse; and I never understand what she wants, but keep making the most wretched blunders. How dreadfully one feels now at what a distance she has always kept everybody.'

'I don't feel that at all,' said Anne; 'but I can understand your feeling it. I will stay with you. Papa will be glad for me to do so.'

Fresh intelligence arrived from the seat of war. David Mervyn was recovering from his wounds. There was a consultation upon the expediency of telling his mother that this news had come. She was apparently unconscious, and had not spoken for some days, and the general opinion was that it was useless. Anne thought otherwise. It was agreed that it could not harm the patient that good tidings should be told; so Anne, kneeling beside her bed, put her lips close to the pale, clouded face, and said very distinctly: 'There is good news of David. He is recovering, and will write to you soon.'

There was no attempt at a reply, but Lady Mervyn's head moved restlessly, and after a while she moaned. Anne felt satisfied that her words had been understood.

Though Marion, Sir Alexander, and Anne Cairnes all entertained a friendly regard for Susan Gale, chiefly because Lady Mervyn esteemed and valued her, it was not unnatural that she should speedily be forgotten, in the great trouble which had befallen them. Of course, the accident which occasioned her death was discussed, and the fact that it had given Lady Mervyn a great shock was admitted; but no one thought of imputing more than the rapid declaration of her illness to that cause. Every one in the house had noticed her looks, on her return from London, and the unanimity with which it appeared that the servants had predicted that her ladyship would 'be regularly laid up after this' was surprising. Her maid, Crawford, was questioned about her health during her stay in London, but she had nothing to tell. Her ladyship had seemed just as usual, but she had seen very little of her; for she was out all day, except one, and then she had not seen her at all. Crawford was totally unaware that Lady Mervyn had seen Mrs Gale, so that she could not communicate the fact, which would have lent additional meaning to the subsequent events. An inquest was held on the bodies of the victims of the accident, with the usual result, and the sufferers were identified, with the exception of

the young woman who was supposed to be the mother of the two infants, of whom one, though injured, survived, and had been taken to the work-house infirmary, where the child was to be kept until she should be claimed by her relatives. The name on the mother's clothing, and on one trunk among her luggage, was Jane Watts; but she had no letters, or papers, indicative of her former residence. These particulars had been carelessly read by Sir Alexander and Anne, but they were not regarded with any interest. The accident was fully discussed among the servants, of course, on account of James Thompson, who was sent by Marion to attend his sister's funeral. There, he learned from her husband that Susan had been summoned to London by Lady Mervyn, had seen her ladyship, and had undertaken some service for her, of the nature of which he (Gale) was ignorant. But as he added that Lady Mervyn had strictly enjoined Susan to keep silent on the subject of her summons to every one except her husband, James Thompson was inclined to resent his brother-in-law's information. If her ladyship did not wish it to be known to *any one*, that extended to him as well as to other people, and Gale had no business to tell him; though, of course, her ladyship should never know that her confidence had been even to that extent broken. Such being James Thompson's notions of loyalty to her ladyship, it will be pretty clear that no one at Barrholme was at all likely to be supplied by him with material for speculation. So it was agreed that the shock of Susan's death had merely been the last and slightest of many accumulated causes of Lady Mervyn's illness, and the event slipped away into oblivion as the weeks rolled on.

No letter came from David Mervyn to his mother. The Head of the Medical Staff at Scutari wrote to her—it was agreed on all hands that this letter should be opened by Sir Alexander—that he had been obliged to give her letter, inclosed to him, to Captain Mervyn, at an earlier stage of his convalescence than he considered quite prudent (but he did not refer to her acknowledgment that the letter was of a disquieting nature), in consequence of his patient's extreme anxiety to receive intelligence of his family, which made it necessary to tranquillise his mind. This letter, kind, but curt and business-like, excited no suspicion, and relieved them from apprehension about David. A fortnight later, and when there was a perceptible amendment in Lady Mervyn's condition, the promised communication, in David's own hand, reached Barrholme, but it was addressed to Sir Alexander.

'How very strange,' said Marion, who had taken it out of the post-bag. 'David always directs his letters to mamma, even when there is one inclosed for my father. One would think he had a presentiment of her illness. No one can have sent the news of it out there, surely. I hope not; we have warned all the people who wrote out to the Crimea, to say nothing about it.'

David's letter to his father was short. It announced his convalescence, and his hope of speedily being fit for active service again; and it contained a general inquiry and a general message, in addition to a hope that his father had not suffered from anxiety about him. Then David added: 'Tell my mother her injunctions shall be attended to. I cannot promise to write much, or often;

you will have the official reports, and must take no news for good news.'

Sir Alexander saw nothing to blame or to object to in this mere note. He wondered what the women could possibly expect David to write about, except, indeed, his plasters and bandages, and he was, of course, glad enough to forget all about them.

Again, Anne Cairnes resolved that she would give Lady Mervyn the chance of comprehending that news from her son had reached his home. She was mending, very slowly indeed, and the change in her appearance was frightful to contemplate. When she should rise from her bed, it would be as an old woman; she, whom this illness had stricken in all the dignity and pleasantness of well-preserved middle age. Her hair had turned gray; and the fine colour, which had lasted so wonderfully, had given place to a pale waxen complexion. The beauty of form was the only charm left to her. Anne was looking attentively at her as she slept, a deep untroubled sleep—no longer the painful stillness of stupor—and thinking of this, thinking how much it would grieve David, on his return, to note the change in his mother, and thanking God, from the depths of her true heart, for the two lives given back to those who held them so dear, when Lady Mervyn's eyes opened, and she turned them, with a sort of half-intelligence, on Anne, meeting her steadfast gaze.

'Dear Lady Mervyn,' she began; but the sick woman stopped her speech by a whispered question.

'David's wife?' she said.

'No, no,' answered the girl, while a crimson blush suffused her face; 'only Anne.'

PROLONGATION OF LIFE.

WHETHER we have borrowed from the French, or the French from us, or neither, it is quite certain that both we and they, and, probably, many another nation, have a popular saying about 'making old bones,' and that the desirability of that operation has been impressed upon us from our very earliest years, either when long life was suggested as the reward of those who should honour father and mother, or when we listened to the familiar eastern exclamation: 'O king, live for ever!' Nor, indeed, when we speak of 'old bones,' do we use a merely figurative expression; as will be easily discovered from Dr John Gardner's work entitled *Longevity: the Means of prolonging Life after Middle Age*, which contains many useful hints, and which has already met with so much appreciation as is implied in the issue of a second edition.

And now let us ask: Are 'old bones,' or, in other words, is long evity desirable? That is a question which must be answered in the affirmative or the negative, according to the particular feelings of the person or persons to whom it is addressed. But experience teaches us that, with very few exceptions, no living creature, unless extreme bodily or mental affliction supervene, would willingly part with one hour's existence.

And even in the case of those who, from sheer agony and wretchedness of mind or body, are inclined to gnaw their hearts, and ask themselves what good their lives shall do them, and whether it would not be better for them never to have been born, or, at anyrate, to depart at once and be at rest, it would be well for them to reflect that it may be something less commendable than a holy resignation which prompts them to say :

And sweeter far is death than life to me, who long to go.

Whilst there is a living being to whom we may, either by example or precept, by our authority or our service, do good ; whilst there is a soul—and as long as we have fellow-creatures, there are myriads—to whom we owe a duty ; whilst there is any kind of beneficial work which we may, to the most infinitesimal extent, promote in the world, it is not only selfish, but also something very like desertion of a flag, very like cowardice in the presence of the enemy, to encourage any other feeling save the determination of fighting on to the last. Be it granted, then, that, in the great majority of instances, 'long life' is, for some powerful reason, desirable.

The next question that occurs is this : When may we be said to have made or to be making 'old bones' ?

On this point, Dr Gardner is a most exhilarating informant. He allows, indeed, that the period cannot 'be strictly defined by years.' Some human beings, like some race-horses which are 'run off their legs' at two years of age, are too early exposed to the effects of wear-and-tear, and necessarily, instead of being strengthened by what might otherwise have been a severe, perhaps, but an invigorating and a hardening discipline, break down, and fall into premature decay. Then 'the phrase *fast living* is full of meaning. It implies a crowding of pleasures or sufferings into a shorter compass than natural ;' and, if we burn a candle at both ends, we cannot take the time in which it is consumed as a fair criterion of the lasting powers of candles in general, reasonably treated. Let us, however, put our human candle in a proper candle-stick, and burn it moderately, and snuff it and trim it carefully, and it will last so long that, as Dr Gardner says, 'observation has convinced me that sixty-three is an age at which the majority of persons may be termed old ; and, as a rule, we may adopt this as the epoch of the commencing decline of life.' This is calculated to cheer the spirits of those who have been told that 'a man is old at forty-five ;' but it will, on the other hand, prove a 'damper' to those who 'have considered seventy the normal standard.' Let not even the latter, however, be unduly discouraged ; for the doctor, adopting, with certain modifications, the views of M. Flourens, 'would bring the natural life of man to be from ninety to one hundred and five years,' and would, therefore, draw the satisfactory, or, from another point of view, unsatisfactory inference, 'that all persons who die under eighty years of age, many who die under ninety, some who die under one hundred, or even one hundred and five, die prematurely.' And that more persons live to the age of a hundred than were dreamt of in the philosophy of the late Sir

George Cornewall Lewis, is conclusively proved, contrary, one would say, to the very candid author's own bias and expectations, in that most laborious, sagacious, instructive, and entertaining work called *Human Longevity, its Facts and its Fictions*, by W. J. Thoms, the learned and honoured late editor of *Notes and Queries*, a work which everybody who has not read it should read. It may be advisable to remark in passing, for the benefit of those who are not familiar with the views, alluded to above, of M. Flourens, that he, 'taking his observations from the group Mammalia, of the class Vertebrata, as having the closest resemblance to man . . . found that their natural life extends exactly to five times the period of their growth ;' and, 'applying the rule thus obtained to human life, and taking the age when the body is fully matured to be twenty years, he concludes the natural duration of the life of man to be *one hundred years*.' It does not appear, unfortunately, that M. Flourens made any allowance for the fuss, worry, knagging, and aggravation from which all mammals, except man, appear to be tolerably exempt ; which every human being has to endure more or less ; and which, as fatal to sensitive natures as disease or privation, tend to materially shorten existence.

It being premised, then, that, under normal conditions, it is possible and desirable for anybody to 'make old bones,' and that the process of making them ought not to commence much earlier than the age of sixty-three, the next step is to ascertain whether 'the duration of life' is 'in any degree within our power.' Dr Gardner, supporting his assertion by the epigrammatic statement of a French writer to the effect that 'men do not usually die ; they kill themselves,' unhesitatingly affirms that it is, and mentions what he terms some 'incontrovertible facts.' First, that 'the average duration of life has increased during the present century in England and some other countries ;' secondly, that 'this average varies with different classes of society, and with different occupations,' so that 'the clergy enjoy the longest lives : medical men have the shortest ;' and thirdly, to the confusion of the very commonly held belief that old age is more frequent amongst the poor than amongst others, that 'the rich, or those exempt from the cares and anxieties of business, *everything else being equal*, live longer than the middle classes, or the poor.' Of course, when he says *everything else being equal*, he means it to be inferred that, as the middle classes and the poor are very much more numerous than the rich, we might expect to find many more cases of old age amongst the former combined than amongst the latter : from which state of things, unless due regard be had to *proportion*, an erroneous conclusion may be and, indeed, has been drawn. The 'incontrovertible facts' are traced to five principal causes—to wit, 'sanitary improvements enforced by law ; the more wholesome and provident habits of all classes—in avoiding the recognised causes of disease ; better food, clothing, ventilation and drainage of dwellings, the use of coal as fuel, &c. ; draining and cultivation of the land ; and the progress of the arts of healing—medicine and surgery ;' and, as those causes are undoubtedly under our control, we may assume that the duration of life is to a very considerable extent within our power, and that it lies with

ourselves, bar accidents and plain visitations, to determine whether we will or will not 'make old bones,' and, having made them, keep them from becoming a mere burden.

What are the means, then, of 'ameliorating and retarding the effects of age?' First of all, we are assured of one very consolatory fact, that 'the natural healing or recuperative power . . . remains in the system in old people until a very great age.' We are then admonished that 'the principal points claiming the attention of aged persons, even when enjoying the best health,' are 'a tranquil mind, well-selected and arranged diet, moderation in the use of wine and other stimulants, exercise short of fatigue in favourable states of the weather, confinement to a warm house in cold or wet weather, well-warmed and ventilated sleeping-apartments, clothing adapted to the seasons, maintenance of the animal heat of the body, particularly of the lower extremities, careful avoidance of external influences tending to produce disease, malaria, and the like,' and 'judicious bathing, to secure a healthy skin.' In other words, the elixir of life is little more than another name for common-sense.

Our doctor condescends to enter into particulars. He places water, as Pindar placed it of old, first of all things; and he truly remarks that, 'when it is considered how large a proportion of water enters into the composition of our bodies,' and when we are discussing the question of 'making old bones,' or, in other words, 'how to preserve and extend life in advanced age, the character of the water habitually taken must be regarded.' He recommends, if the cost be not an obstacle, distilled water, charged, to take away its vapidity and unpleasantness 'when drunk without admixture,' with carbonic acid gas; and he suggests that persons who have arrived at the distinction of making 'old bones' should 'occasionally and often substitute pure hot water,' not lukewarm, but 'as hot as it can be taken,' for all other drink at their meals, 'especially if any feeling of oppression and fullness is experienced after eating.' As to the use of mineral waters, two precautions are given: B should not take a water which has been beneficial to A, 'unless he is quite sure his own case is the same;' nor should a mineral water, which has for a time been found efficacious, be proceeded with beyond a certain point, any more than a farmer should over-dose his land with repetitions of a particular kind of 'dressing.' It is roundly affirmed that 'the life of the Emperor Napoleon III. was evidently cut short prematurely by just such a proceeding with the waters of Vichy.' As to stimulants, our doctor teaches that 'sobriety is most congenial to health and life,' but, 'as a physician,' he declares that a moderate use of good sound malt liquor or good sound wine is advantageous rather than not, and that the 'bold assertions' made by advocates of 'total abstinence' are 'of no more soundness than the Bacchanalian songs which represent wine as the panacea for all human ills.' As regards climate, we are told that 'if the recorded cases of persons who have attained to a great age, say ninety and upwards, are tabulated according to the locality where they have occurred, it might be concluded that climate has had little influence,' and that, on the whole, 'persons who have passed the line of demarcation between adult and old age, would do

best by making judicious arrangements at home for warmth, pleasing occupation, exercise, and diet.' As to edibles, 'food rich in albuminous or staminal principles, such as eggs, with solid but juicy and tender meats, are to be recommended as the staple articles,' and a good word is said for what is known as the 'milk-cure,' a remedy consisting in 'living for a time exclusively on milk,' which is declared to have 'nothing of charlatanism about it,' and to be quite in accordance with physiology. As to the pains, which very frequently, if not always, accompany advanced life, and 'which we constantly hear spoken of erroneously as *rheumatic*,' they, 'wherever situated, and of whatever degree, should . . . be relieved;' and it is satisfactory to learn that 'science has furnished the means;' though what they are, and whence they are to be obtained, and how they are to be applied, must be elicited from the doctor himself, or from his book. It must be sufficient to state here, that 'narcotics should be employed, for the most part, only as temporary expedients to afford relief from suffering; they are at best but palliatives, and they may obscure the real disease which is causing the pain.' About baths, some advice is given. Elderly persons are warned against the use of the Turkish bath, unless at the instance and under the direction of a physician; hot-water baths are not to be taken without great care; hot-air or vapour baths are less open to objection; and 'for cleanliness, and to preserve a healthy state of the skin,' our doctor recommends 'all old people to employ hot water with soap and flannel or sponge (the flannel is best), using a moderate degree of friction.' As to *podophyllin*, which our doctor claims to have 'introduced to the profession in this country,' and which he extols 'as an alterative and means of evacuating bile,' so efficacious that 'I would not wish to live,' said a sufferer, 'if I had not *podophyllin*,' we are warned, nevertheless, that 'it ought always to be taken, when needed, under skilful advice as to quantity and frequency.'

It should be mentioned, before the subject of 'old bones' is dismissed, that our doctor differs from Sir Henry Holland, who, in his essay on *Old Age*, 'says the sympathy between the several parts of the body and their influence on each other diminish with age:' our doctor's observation leads him to a contrary belief.

In conclusion, let justice be done to the sensible manner in which our doctor holds up to reprobation the jests which wits and satirists and fools have levelled at the 'nervousness and anxiety' displayed by aged people about their 'old bones.' 'How sorry,' he observes pertinently, 'would such sallies appear, were they directed against a man's care respecting his dwelling!' Nobody laughs at us for repairing our roof if it let in the rain, or for stopping up a hole in the wall, or for 'anticipating and arresting decay and dilapidations' of brick and mortar, or for attending promptly and minutely to 'loosened beam or sinking foundations;' and, 'if the timely relief of some slight pain, the notice and repair of some scarcely perceptible disorder in the fabric or the feelings, may avert acute and prolonged sufferings, or even save for a lengthened time a valuable life—and every life is valuable—is it not most unwise to neglect seeking the remedy?' We glory in making our old boots last; and there is surely at least as much reason to glory in prolonging the serviceableness of our 'old

bones.' And to those valetudinarians who are inclined to despair of themselves let the case be quoted of the 'late Mr S. Rogers, the poet,' who 'said he never knew what health was until he had attained his fiftieth year,' and he lived to be upwards of ninety.

MY ADVENTURES IN THE FRENCH WAR.

CHAPTER II.

GETTING to my quarters at Chagny, and wishing for a little rest after late perturbations, I was next morning told that the colonel desired to speak to me—was, in fact, waiting for me.

'Get your things ready,' he said, when I entered his tent; 'I am off to Tours on duty. There will be no fighting for some days, and you had better accompany me, so as to get your papers in order.' An hour later, we were starting for that town.

When for this, the second time I visited Tours, the Government of the National Defence was represented by three men, under whom everything was in the greatest confusion; for no steps were taken to put down the anarchy which prevailed in the large towns of France. Communism, which means the rule of the mob and robbery all round, was rampant. Lyons had hoisted the red flag, and set an example of pillaging; Marseilles had murdered its prefect, and Toulon the officers of the Empire. Instead of being the centre of a well-organised activity, Tours had become the rendez-vous of all sorts of adventurers, some of them full of schemes for destroying the Germans, others anxious to get contracts by which they might enrich themselves—one of these gentry, it will be recollected, contracting to supply shoes, the soles of which turned out to be made of pasteboard. I was thankful to get away from this scene of corruption. My papers being ready, I hurried away to join my regiment, which had, with the rest of the 20th corps, gone from Chagny to Gien, a small town on the Loire.

The next day, long before daybreak, the bugles sounded the *réveil*; orders had been sent that we were to leave our position, and march through the Forest of Orleans to a place called the *Rond-Point*. What a day it was! From morning till night, nothing but rain without ceasing. When we struck our tents, it was pouring; and when at night we pitched them on the spot chosen for our new bivouac, it was still coming mercilessly down. As the day advanced, and the ground got softer, the men gradually lost their *entrain* and the elasticity of their step. The weight of their knapsacks and their clothes, saturated and heavy with water, began to tell, but they kept on encouraging one another; and when a young hand slackened his pace, and could barely carry his rifle, a stronger comrade would relieve him of the burden.

It was late when we reached our encampment, but the tents soon sprung up around us, the fires were lighted, and the soup prepared; and our little camp quickly assumed an air of comparative comfort, which we doubly appreciated after our weary and uncomfortable march. I was superintending the important operations of raising the tent I was to share with my sub, when my name was called out as the officer charged with the command of an outpost on the verge of the forest. Not venturing to cast a lingering look upon the spot, where lay

behind me the anticipated luxuries of a freshly arranged straw-bed, I started off at the head of my little party, and we were soon lost in the intricacies of the forest. The night was spent in feeling our way, and at daybreak, according to orders, we fell back on the main body.

It was five that morning when we broke up our little encampment. The march the preceding day had been long and wearisome, and our few hours' rest had certainly not refreshed us. It was towards the end of November, so I need not add that the night had been uncomfortably cold, and when the *réveil* sounded, we were not sorry to leave our *tentes d'abri*, and to stretch our stiffened limbs, finding the bivouac fire more to our tastes than the shelter of a frosted canvas.

At seven, the march commenced, and we had proceeded some miles, before the feeble rays of the morning sun had penetrated the heavy mist that enveloped everything around us. As the day advanced, the temperature became milder, and our spirits rose also; the vapour, that still hung over us, now skirting the ground, was soon dispelled, and every blade of grass sparkled with white frost. I was then able to note the objects which were made perceptible by the bluish-gray light of the morning. The mist being rolled off, and the country through which we were passing gradually opening out, allowed us to notice at once the difference between the highly cultivated and rich landscapes of the fertile Touraine, or the picturesque scenery of hill and dale of the Vosges, and the flat uninteresting plains through which we were passing.

At noon we reached the village of Bellegarde, and then we halted, to prepare our mid-day meal. But a sad disappointment awaited us; the fires were lit, the meat and rice were boiling in the pots, when all of a sudden a great commotion took place around us, and the colonel gave the order to fall in. The contents of the pans (the dinner of the men) were left untouched, the cans were overturned, and with a hungry look, such as no one who has not been obliged to abandon a well-earned repast can understand, every one stood under arms.

'The division is engaged, gentlemen, and we must push on. Forward!'

And nearly at the double we emerged from the village. The fear of being too late to take part in the action, the desire of supporting our division, made us forget our previous fatigues and our empty stomachs. After half an hour's march, we halted on the side of the road. Before us, the ground was hilly, and although a distant rumbling, like that of thunder, told us that artillery was somewhere at work, we had yet perceived no other sign of the engagement. Then a staff-officer passed us at full gallop, shouting to advance, and to take ground on the left, and he was off again.

'You will take thirty men of your company, sir,' said the colonel, addressing me, 'and form a rear-guard. You will fix bayonets; and if any man turns back, do your duty.' And, turning to the men, he added in a voice that could be heard by all: '*Franc-Comtois!* it is the first time I have had the honour of leading you to action. I trust you'll do honour to the county you come from. *En avant!*' Five minutes after, they had disappeared behind the hill. When, in my turn, I reached its crest, a startling sight, which sent through us a

heart-felt thrill, met our eyes—it was the spectacle of a battle in all its wild commotion. As far as the eye could reach in the valley that stretched itself before us, we could see our troops advancing; the skirmishers in the far distance, then the supports in line, and farther back the reserve in column. The firing was incessant, and, amidst the thundering of the artillery, we could discern the crackling of the mitrailleuses. I looked, but in vain, for my regiment; but remembering the instructions given by the staff-officer, I led my men to the left, making my way towards a thicket in that direction. Arrived there, on issuing from the wood, I noticed a farm-house, which seemed to me well situated for a defence. At the double, in Indian file, following a narrow path under cover of trees, without firing a shot, we made our way to it. In five minutes more, it would have been too late, for, at a short distance before us, were advancing the enemy's skirmishers, bent on the same errand. We opened a hot fire upon them from the windows: from behind fagots heaped up in a shed, from every corner which could shelter a man, the deadly chassépot went to work. In the midst of the roar caused by such an unceasing firing, I heard a voice loudly calling from outside, and, on looking, I saw an officer, in staff uniform, galloping towards the house.

'Are you the officer commanding here?' he asked with a strong accent, which betrayed him to be a native of Great Britain.

'Yes, sir,' I replied in English.

He seemed surprised at hearing his native tongue, and then added: 'Oh! all right, then! By order of the commander-in-chief, you must hold this position at any cost. Reinforcements are coming.' As he spoke, he reeled back in his saddle, without a cry, and fell heavily to the ground. I rushed to him, but a flow of blood issuing from his mouth, and the contraction of his features, told me well enough that aid would be of no avail. He had been shot through the mouth, and the bullet had passed right through the head.*

The turn that things were taking soon called me back to my post. Evidently deceived as to our numerical strength, the enemy had changed his tactics. Artillery was called upon to play against us, and, with a long monotonous whiz, a shell came and burst a few yards in our rear, then a second to the front, and a third (how admirably these guns were served!), with a tremendous roar, crashed through the roof, burying us under a mass of falling bricks and mortar. Then other deadly missiles came in fast succession; and the walls crumbled down, the roof took fire, and the position being no longer tenable, I directed my men to a deep ditch, which could offer better protection from the galling fusillade of the enemy. As I led my little band out of our battered fortress, a strong shock threw me head-foremost to the ground, where I remained stunned for some time; when I looked up again, my sergeant and my corporal lay prostrate at my feet, weltering in their blood, one with both legs shattered, and the other frightfully mutilated. A sickening sight it was, and my heart failed me, when I saw those two fine fellows,

* This officer was Captain Ogilvie, a nephew of Lord Airlie. He had only a few days before taken service with many others of his countrymen in the cause of France. He was buried the next day in the cemetery of Belle-garde.

who, a short time before, were so full of life and vigour, distorted by the agony of a violent death.

'For God's sake, lieutenant, put an end to my tortures,' gasped out the corporal, when I squeezed his hand as a parting farewell.

I turned round, anxiously looking for the expected reinforcements, and none came; and then, for the first time, a feeling of fear crept over me, yes! fear, weakness, terror, an inevitable death amidst a wholesale slaughter. Here we were marks at long range, so to speak, of a gunnery to which we could make no reply. And therein is very much an explanation of the terrible success of the Germans. What signified French dash, *élan*, and so forth, when at a mile off you were swept to destruction? No wonder I had cause for apprehension in standing powerless to be shot at. All around lay a crowd of disfigured bodies, who a few minutes before had been men full of life and spirit. At every roar of the shells, the circle of corpses was extended. I felt as if standing in a sort of human shambles; and the spectacle grew so horrifying that I began to ask myself whether it was right in me to remain.

Again I looked round, trying to pierce the smoke of the firearms, and of the burning house, that blew right in our faces and nearly suffocated us; to hear through the din of the artillery; and yet no supports came. I walked up and down behind the ditch, encouraging the men, telling them to fire steadily. I spoke loudly, to excite myself; I tried to smile, and still I was afraid. The enemy, in black swarms, were advancing slowly but steadily towards us; I could see them on the right, on the left, coming out of ditches, from behind walls and hedges, at times creeping and disappearing, protected by small dwarf apple-trees, or crouching in the low brushwood, and then rushing forward, their officers leading them on.

Then a terrible thought struck me: What if the general is not aware of our position? What if he waits for that officer there, prostrate at my feet, to know if supports are wanted?

Again I looked; the Germans were pressing on. So close were they, that I could hear the *Vorwärts! Vorwärts!* of their officers. There were some cavalry on our right, and I expected them to charge us at every moment. Our ammunition was getting exhausted; the men, now reduced to twelve, had emptied the pouches of the dead and wounded. They looked at me for orders: there was the determination of men ready to the last extremity to do their duty, depicted on their faces, begrimed with powder. I thought no more of danger, all fear vanished as proudly I looked at them.

'Fix bayonets, and prepare to receive them, my lads,' I shouted, and drawing my sword, I cleared the ditch, and took the lead.

All of a sudden, there came from behind us a shout that was heard above the roar of the battle. '*Vive la France!* Forward, the gallant *Franc-Comtois!*' and like a whirlwind, my regiment, headed by its gray-headed colonel, swept past us.

What followed, I can scarcely remember; for some time all was a wild confusion of shouts and groans, of savage yells and cries for mercy. There was another prolonged '*Vive la France!*' and the enemy fled in disorder towards the village of Lorcey. The bugles sounded the rally; and, mounted on our adjutant's horse, as, from a wound in the

foot, although a mere contusion from the fragment of a shell, I was unable to walk at the head of my gallant little band, I marched back to Bellegarde, amidst the cheers that accompanied a gun captured by some lancers from the enemy.

In the midst of those sanguinary times, surrounded by so much desolation and agony, it is pleasant to recall and dwell upon the one point in the picture which brightened up then, as it still does, these sad realities. This was presented to us by the untiring zeal, the unremitting care, and well-directed activity of that devoted band of men who brought help and consolation along with them wherever it was needed. As far as I could see or learn, the ambulance officers, whether French or German, or of any other nationality, made no difference in their humane efforts to meliorate the condition of the combatants on both sides. All were treated alike.

Although the hour was advanced, I knew that they would not deny me help. To the ambulance I betook myself as soon as I reached Bellegarde, and accompanied by a surgeon and his staff, I led the way back to where my brave men had fallen. Out of the thirty who had been put under my command that morning, eighteen lay stretched on the cold ground of a November night. Over eleven of the number, the chill hand of death had already passed, and these fine young fellows were as cold and stiff as the sword on which they lay. The others, among whom was my sergeant, were laid carefully on carts, and taken back to Bellegarde.

Thus ended our first day with the enemy. I thought at the time that it was part of Von der Tann's army we had met and repulsed that morning, and that, encouraged by that success, we were soon to march on Paris.

SIGNAL-LIGHT AT THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT—(POSTSCRIPT).

In our article on this subject (*Chambers's Journal*, August 22, 1874), a brief summary was given of the results of comparative observations on the Gramme Electric Light and the Wigham Gas Light, in regard alike to the intensity and steadiness of the illumination, and to the cost of construction and maintenance. The information, so far as concerns numerical tabulations, and the inference drawn therefrom by Mr Douglass, was derived from his official Report, printed as a parliamentary paper. We are informed that Mr Wigham has since addressed a protest to the First Commissioner of Works and Public Buildings, against Mr Douglass's Report; objecting to the mode in which the photometric experiments and observations were carried on (Mr Wigham himself not being present), and to the financial estimates of cost. This protest, entering with much fulness into the details of the subject, has not yet, we believe, been printed as a parliamentary paper.

Whatever be the merits of this question, it is not inopportune to mention that Mr Wigham's system of gas-lighting, depending mainly on the use of a peculiarly constructed burner, has been, and is now being successfully used in many lighthouses. The Irish Lighthouse Board, on the suggestion or invitation of Mr Wigham in 1863, instituted experiments, and reported on them in 1865. Dr Tyndall assisted at further experiments

in 1867: on that occasion, and again in 1870, he pointed out many reasons why the Wigham light might be advantageously tried to a still further degree. Ten lighthouses—including those on Hill of Howth, Wicklow Head, Hook Tower, Hime Head, &c.—now adopt, or will soon adopt this light. As to the real comparative merits of gas, oil, and the electric light for lighthouses and signal-towers, it is evident that the time for a final decision has not yet arrived. For one thing, it has to be borne in mind, that at certain lighthouses—such as the Bell Rock and Skerryvore—gas would be quite impracticable, for there is no exterior space for any gas-making apparatus; and even if there were, the difficulty of landing and storing coal for furnaces and retorts forms an insuperable objection.

LOVE AND LABOUR.

We die not all: for our deeds remain
To crown with honour, or mar with stain;
Through endless sequence of years to come
Our lives shall speak, when our lips are dumb.

What though we perish, unknown to fame,
Our tomb forgotten, and lost our name,
Since naught is wasted in heaven or earth,
And nothing dies to which God gives birth.

Though life be joyless, and death be cold,
And pleasures pall as the world grows old,
Yet God has granted our hearts relief,
For Love and Labour can conquer grief.

Love sheds a light on the gloomy way,
And Labour hurries the weary day:
Though death be fearful, and life be hard,
Yet Love and Labour shall win reward.

If Love can dry up a single tear,
If lifelong Labour avail to clear
A single web from before the true,
Then Love and Labour have won their due.

What though we mourn, we can comfort pain;
What if we die, so the truth be plain:
A little spark from a high desire
Shall kindle others, and grow a fire.

We are not worthy to work the whole;
We have no strength which may save a soul;
Enough for us if our life begin
Successful struggle with grief and sin.

Labour is mortal, and fades away,
But Love shall triumph in perfect day;
Labour may wither beneath the sod,
But Love lives ever, for Love is God.

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